

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY NASSAU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1137

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AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SGEN, SHUM, CGEN, BF, HA

SUBJ: GCOB ROUNDUP OF ILLEGAL HAITIAN ALIENS

1. AS HAD BEEN PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED EARLIER THIS YEAR IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES, THE BAHAMAS MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS LAUNCHED, ON JUNE 11, A MASSIVE ROUNDUP OF ILLEGAL HAITIAN IMMIGRANTS LIVING ON NEW PROVIDENCE ISLAND (NASSAU). NUMERICAL ESTIMATES OF THOSE BEING HELD IN GOVERNMENT PRISON VARY FROM 250 TO OVER 300, THE HAITIAN CONSUL GENERAL (ALEXANDRE PAUL) HAVING TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT NOT EVEN THE PRISON AUTHORITIES ARE CERTAIN OF THE EXACT NUMBER. PAUL ALSO CLAIMED THAT APPROXIMATELY TEN JAMAICAN NATIONALS ARE AMONG THOSE BEING HELD.

2. PAUL STATES THAT THE ROUNDUP, WHICH IS TO BE FOLLOWED BY INVOLUNTARY REPATRIATION, IS NOT ONLY CONTRARY TO EXISTING AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE GCOB AND GOH, BUT THAT HIS EFFORTS TO ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE THE MATTER MORE AMICABLY AND IN A MORE CIVILIZED MANNER HAD BEEN THWARTED BY THE INCOMPETENCE AND INDIFFERENCE OF HIGH BAHAMIAN OFFICIALS. (PAUL CLAIMS TO HAVE SEEN MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS ADDERLEY WHO EXPRESSED HIS

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SHOCK AND DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PRESENT CAMPAIGN, AND PRIME MINISTER PINDLING WHO PROMISED THAT MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS WOULD CONTACT HIM PERSONALLY. ACCORDING TO PAUL, HIS GOVERNMENT HAS FORMALLY PROTESTED THIS "GROSS VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS" AND HIS MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS STANDS READY TO COME TO NASSAU IMMEDIATELY IF IT WERE FELT THAT SUCH A VISIT COULD LEAD TO A SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM. IN ADDITION, PAUL CLAIMS

THAT IF THE GCOB CONTINUES TO HOLD HAITIAN IMMIGRANTS OR DETAINS MORE OF THEM, GOH IS STRONGLY CONSIDERING RAISING THE MATTER IN INTERNATIONAL FORA, I.E. OAS AND UN. HE HOPES, HOWEVER, THAT SUCH A COURSE WILL NOT PROVE NECESSARY.

3. IN THE MEANTIME, GCOB ANNOUNCED ON JUNE 13 THAT THE ROUNDUP OF ILLEGAL ALIENS HAD BEEN TEMPORARILY DISCONTINUED FOR 14 DAYS "TO ALLOW ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS TO CLOSE OUT BANK ACCOUNTS AND OTHERWISE SETTLE THEIR AFFAIRS AND LEAVE THE COUNTRY." THE ANNOUNCEMENT, WHILE OSTENSIBLY MADE FOR HUMANITARIAN REASONS, WAS, ACCORDING TO A PRISON OFFICIAL IN CONVERSATION WITH AN EMBASSY OFFICER, ACTUALLY MOTIVATED BY ALREADY SEVERE OVERCROWDING IN THE PRISON. BOTH PAUL AND THE PRISON OFFICIAL ALSO DESCRIBED THE CONDITIONS AT THE PRISON AS "APPALLING," WITH PAUL ALLUDING TO "CONCENTRATION CAMP" ENVIRONMENT.

4. COMMENT: INFLUX OF ILLEGAL HAITIANS TO BAHAMAS, BOTH AS A FINAL STOPPING PLACE AND AS A POINT OF TRANSIT TO THE UNITED STATES, IS NOTHING NEW ALTHOUGH IT HAS APPARENTLY CONSIDERABLY DIMINISHED FROM THE 60S WHEN HAITIAN LABORERS CONSTITUTED THE WORK FORCE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF FREEPORT AS WELL AS FOR THE EXPANSION OF TOURIST FACILITIES IN NASSAU. POST ESTIMATES THAT THERE ARE AS MANY AS 10,000-12,000 ILLEGAL HAITIANS NOW RESIDING IN THE BAHAMAS. WHILE THE GCOB HAS CLAIMED THAT THE REASON FOR DEPORTATION IS THE NECESSITY TO FIND ADDITIONAL JOBS FOR NATIVE-BORN BAHAMIANS (YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT HERE IS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ESTIMATED AT OVER 35 PERCENT), IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT MANY BAHAMIANS WOULD PERFORM THE MENIAL AND MANUAL LABOR JOBS NOW BEING PERFORMED BY HAITIANS, I.E. GARDENERS AND COMMON DAY LABORERS. IN OUR VIEW, IT IS MORE LIKELY THAT THE GCOB LAUNCHED THE CURRENT CRACKDOWN NOT SO MUCH TO FREE JOBS, BUT TO GIVE THE APPEARANCE OF AT LEAST DOING SOMETHING ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT OTHER THAN TALKING ABOUT IT IN THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY. WE HAVE NOT DISCUSSED MATTER WITH GCOB OFFICIALS, NOR DO WE INTEND TO DO SO. LIKEWISE, WE HAVE LIMITED OUR RESPONSES TO PAUL -- WHO HAS REQUESTED NOTHING -- TO EXPRESSIONS OF SYMPATHY WITH PERSONAL PLIGHT OF BOTH HIMSELF AND HIS FELLOW CITIZENS. EMBASSY WILL KEEP DEPARTMENT AND EMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE APPRIZED OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS AS THEY OCCUR.
TAYLOR

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